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ABSTRACT

This lesson for grade 12 is designed to increase student awareness of citizen participation elements of democracy. Students assume the teacher's role and design a lesson to teach citizen participation in democracy, including methods to combat citizen apathy. Students are provided with background information, detailed instructions, on-line resources, and reflection questions. The teacher's notes describe the unit's purpose, its correlation to history/social science and language arts standards, and adaptations for special needs students. (RJC)

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Schools of California Online Resources for Education (SCORE): Connecting California's Classrooms to the World

So You Think You Can Teach? Democracy in America

12th Grade Lesson by David MacDonald

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http://score.rims.k12.ca.us/activity/democracy/

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So You Think You Can Teach?

Democracy in America

You are presently on top of the world, having just graduated from the University with a degree in secondary education. After a long and arduous search, you have landed your dream job teaching civics at your old high school. After visiting with the principal, you decide to take a nostalgic walk around campus and you are astonished by what you see. Garbage is on the ground, graffiti covers the walls, windows are broken and you perceive an air of indifference among the students.

Coming upon a small group nearby, you ask them why the school grounds are in such a mess and they just laugh at you. They say that it's not their job to keep the school clean. You shake your head in dismay as you walk off and wonder where it all went wrong at Sunnyside High.

As you head back into the office you are determined to find out from the principal how the school got to the state it is in. He just smiles and say's, "That's why we hired you. It's your job to teach these kids some respect and build school spirit in this apathetic student body."

Later that night it all came to you in a "reality check". Sunnyside High is no different than any other high school in this democracy called the United States. The reason for the sorry state of affairs lies in our approach to democracy. Like a "two-by-four to the head" you realize the answer. What's wrong at Sunnyside is the same thing that is wrong with the rest of America.

Trash on the ground? "Hey, it's not mine!" Breaking the rules? "Hey, everyone else does it!" Damage to private property? "Hey, they got insurance! I can do what I want, I've got my rights." It doesn't appear that people young and old are buying into the "common welfare" concept of democracy.

Is citizen responsibility for the common welfare in a free society a concept meant for another time and another place? With the resolve of a lion tamer you decide that you are going to stop at nothing until you have taught each one of your students just what democracy is and it's importance to everyone's future.

The Task

In pairs or by yourself, you are to prepare a lesson plan to teach the concepts of democracy in such a way as to infuse your students with a renewed interest in their country and their fellow human beings. In order to do this successfully, it is necessary to research the answers to these and many other questions related to democracy.

- What exactly is meant by the word democracy? Where did the term originate?
- Are the terms "democracy" and "freedom" synonymous? If they are, why does freedom have so many limits in the United States?
- How many democracies besides the United States exist today? How are they alike/different from ours?
- What kind of "democracy" does the United States have?
- Evaluate the state of our democracy in the U.S. and give it a grade.
- What are the obstacles that democracies face in our present world?
- Does voting really matter? Do people have the right to be left alone and
- not participate?

The Process

In your team, or by yourself you are to research these questions and any other concepts related to the successful teaching of democracy. You are going to be presenting a full lesson plan that will involve, enthuse and educate the students in your class. Begin by researching the topics using available resources such as the Internet, CD-ROM encyclopedias, as well as any books related to the subject of democracy.

Resources

The American Promise Community Resource Guide (Probably more than enough places to look)
http://www.pbs.org/kqed/ap/communityguide/index.html

Center for Civic Education
http://www.civiced.org/

U.S. Democracy in Decline
http://www.ionline.net/~activist/Columns/961113.html

Deliberative Democracy
http://www.cpn.org/sections/tools/models/deliberative_democracy.html

Save Zambia's Democracy (Perspective on Democracy in the World)
http://www.zamnet.zm/zamnet/post.arch.23666/news/fpstory.html

Learning Advice

You need to remember that your job is twofold and won't be complete unless you accomplish two things. To get your students "enthused" about democracy you must:

1. Teach your students about the meaning(s) of democracy.
2. Teach your students to buy in to and become more involved in the democratic process.

As you develop your lesson plan, make sure to include material that can be accessed by today's diverse students. Think about the ways you learn best. You will probably encounter students who have immigrated from other countries and cultures and students whose primary language is not English. This activity will be important to help them understand the social values of America.

Reflection

Think about the research, planning, writing and presentation processes you went through in doing this activity.

- Which steps seemed to reap the greatest results in developing your project?
- How would you change your work pattern if you had a chance to repeat the activity?
- What parts of the activity were most valuable to your learning?

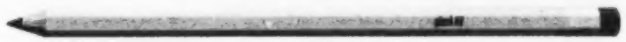
Evaluation

You will be assessed according to the following criteria: match to California's History-Social Science Standards

- http://score.rims.k12.ca.us/standards/grade12_civics.html
- http://score.rims.k12.ca.us/critical_thinking/index.html

quality and richness of the lesson plans and the activities included in them the implementation of the lesson (your presentation of the material)

how the students reacted and participated in what you had to offer them.



Conclusion

1. When your work on this lesson is completed, spend a moment and reflect on your work by answering these questions.
2. How did your understanding of democracy change as a result of completing this project?
3. Given what you have learned about democracy in America, what is your prognosis for the future of this country?
4. What steps can you take today in your school that would encourage more students (and teachers) to become involved in the democratic

process?

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Teacher Notes

Grade Level:

Grade 12: Principals of American Democracy Units 2 and 3
Rights of Citizens
Responsibilities of Citizens

Lesson Purpose:

This lesson is design to increase students awareness of citizen participation elements of democracy.

Language Arts Standards: Grade 11/12

Grade 12

Reading Comprehension: Students read and understand grade-level-appropriate material.

2.5 Students analyze an author's implicit and explicit philosophical assumptions and beliefs about a subject.

Listening and Speaking Strategies: Students formulate adroit judgments about oral communication.

1.1 Students recognize strategies used by media to inform, persuade, entertain, and transmit culture (e.g., advertising, perpetuation of stereotypes, use of visual representations, special effects, language)

Speaking Applications: Students draw comparisons between the specific incident and broader themes that illustrate the speakers beliefs or generalizations about life.

2.3 Students maintain a balance between describing the incident and relating it to more general abstract ideas.

H/SS Standards Grade 12

12.2 Students evaluate, and take and defend positions on the scope and limits of rights and obligations as democratic citizens, the relationships among them, and how they are secured, in terms of:

3.)the legal obligations of obeying the law, serving as a juror, and paying taxes

4.) the obligation of civic-mindedness including voting, being informed on civic issues, volunteering and performing public service, and serving in the military or alternative service

5.) The reciprocity between rights and obligations, i.e., why enjoyment of one's rights entails respect for the rights of others.

12.3 Students evaluate, take and defend positions on what the fundamental values and principles of civil society are (i.e., the autonomous sphere of voluntary personal, social, and economic relations not part of government), their interdependence, and meaning and importance for a free society...

Adaptations for Special Needs- As a part of the lesson to be produced, the students are encouraged to include adaptations for language needs as well as provide a historical perspective for recent arrivals. Teachers are encouraged to change any part of this lesson to fit specific needs of their particular class.

Teachers can do as little or as much prep work with students ahead of time about the concept of democracy. In order to do this lesson completely as well students should be given 2-3 weeks to complete their work.

One of the web areas listed in the resources section refers to the PBS program, " The American Promise ," and can be obtained either free or for a fee by contacting your local Farmers Insurance Agent. It contains many excellent activities for your students to include in their lessons.